

# BRIEF HISTORY OF CANADIAN ASL-ENGLISH INTERPRETING

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In Canada, sign language interpreters, also referred to as ASL-English interpreters or visual language interpreters (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2001), have a long tradition of working with Deaf individuals and organizations within the Deaf community (Carbin, 1996). The following article was written to continue the tradition of documenting the history of the field within a Canadian context (Carbin, 1996; Letourneau, 1990; Russell & Malcolm, 1992; Stratiy, 1996; Taylor, 1988a) and to serve as a resource for interpreter educators and students of interpretation.

In the beginning, most interpreters in Canada provided service on a volunteer basis and had little if any professional training (Carbin, 1996). Many were relatives of a Deaf individual or were employed within a provincial school for the Deaf (Carbin, 1996).

For example, in 1860 the sister of North America's first Deaf lawyer of record, Archibald Leitch MacLellan acted as his interpreter and for their brother Duncan who was also Deaf (Carbin, 1996). Later in 1906, a renowned Deaf hunter, Hans Farret, was interviewed while his son interpreted (Carbin, 1996). The daughter of Gerald Giffore, a Deaf coach in the 1980's, and the son of the Hartland family both interpreted for their parents as well (Carbin, 1996). As recently as 1992, Mallory, Schein and Zingle found again that some Deaf parents in Canada expected their hearing children to provide interpreting services.

However, not all interpreters were family members. In 1877, a sign language interpreter worked with Samuel Greene to interpret his speech to an audience of hearing individuals at an "Assembly of the Chautauqua Movement of Religious Education" (Carbin, 1996, p. 401). The audience was greatly moved by Greene's presentation (Carbin, 1996), a testament to both Greene's public speaking abilities and to the interpreter's proficiency.

In the late 1800's Annie Byrne (née Fraser) was appointed to the role of interpreter and social worker for the Toronto Mission to the Deaf (Carbin, 1996). This was a position she held for 60 years (Carbin, 1996).

In 1902, the Ontario Association of the Deaf publicly thanked two volunteer interpreters who provided service during their biennial convention (Carbin, 1996). In 1912, Candice Brown (later MacPhail) interpreted at the Broadway Baptist Church in Winnipeg for the Deaf congregants (Carbin, 1996). She was not the sole interpreter in Winnipeg at that time, however. The principal for the Manitoba institution, Dr. Howard John McDermid, was also known as an interpreter in the early 1900's (Carbin, 1996). In 1932, Superintendent Rodwell from the Manitoba School for the Deaf was also described as an interpreter in the school's yearbook for the students while on field trips (Stratyi, 1996). Further west, in 1931, history shows that two teachers from the Saskatchewan School for the Deaf served as interpreters for Deaf students in a vocational program within the Saskatoon Technical Collegiate (Carbin, 1996).

In the more recent past, ASL-English interpreters from Ontario worked with Hartley Bressler at McMaster University's medical school from 1990 to 1993 (Carbin, 1996). They also worked with Gary Malkowski, a Member of Provincial Parliament in Ontario and the first elected North American Deaf public official, from 1990 to 1995 (Carbin, 1996).

#### Interpreters in the media

Over the years, Canadian ASL-English interpreters have not only interpreted meetings and religious ceremonies; they have also helped to make the medium of television more accessible to Deaf Canadians. In 1978 "the CBC Evening News was interpreted on Mondays and Fridays for Deaf cable viewers in the B.C. areas of Vancouver, Richmond, and Burnaby" (Carbin, 1996, p. 328). Also in Vancouver, the program Show of Hands, was interpreted by

Mary Butterfield (Carbin, 1996). In 1979, the same interpreter, Mary Butterfield, provided interpretation services for the "House of Commons question and answer period" at the federal government level (Carbin, 1996, p. 328). A few years later in 1981, the program News Digest, which was broadcast in the Avalon region of Newfoundland, was interpreted on a volunteer basis (Carbin, 1996). For several years, the news summary on CJOH TV in Ottawa was interpreted as well. Additionally, interpreters have worked with the actors and performers on a variety of programs such as Edmonton's Sign On program in 1977, and Hands Around Town, Saskatoon's Deaf Talk, and programs in Ontario ranging from Signs of the Times, Deaf Digest, Deaf Talk Show, and Silent News (Carbin, 1996).

#### Deaf Interpreters

The position of ASL-English interpreter is not only limited to hearing individuals in Canada. In a discussion of the history of Deaf Canadians and sign language interpreters, the work of Isabel Crawford, a deafened individual, has been noted (Carbin, 1996; Stratiy, 1996). She might possibly be one of the first Deaf interpreters in Canada (Carbin, 1996; Stratiy, 1996) as she worked with the Kiowa tribe and interpreted for them when they interacted with outsiders (Carbin, 1996).

In the province of Winnipeg in 1988, there was discussion of an interpreter education program or a series of courses for Deaf individuals interested in becoming Deaf interpreters (Mitchell, Evans & Spink-Mitchell, 1988). This was followed by a report in 1990 on the role and use of Deaf interpreters by the Independent Interpreter Referral Service (IIRS) (Dubienksi, 1990).

## Shortage of Personnel

In Canada, it has been reported that there is a shortage of qualified sign language interpreters (Department of the Secretary of State, 1987; Dubienski, 1988; Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 1992; Nova Scotia Community College, 2007; Ontario Association of the Deaf, 1993). In some areas, consumers have taken to contacting interpreter education programs and students to ask them to provide service even prior to graduation (MacFarlane, 1990).

Perhaps due to the shortage, Deaf Canadians have long struggled for access to interpreters and have often been faced with inadequate service. In 1979 Deaf high school students who had been mainstreamed into regular programs in the Montreal area met to discuss the lack of support services available to them (Carbin, 1996). They formed an association in 1981, "L'Association des Etudiants Sourds Post-Secondaire du Quebec" (Carbin, 1996, p. 204) to demand academic support such as sign language interpreters.

## Deaf Community's View of Interpreters

It is important to recognize the perspective Deaf Canadians have on sign language interpreters, as they are one of the primary consumers of sign language interpreting services. In 1988 the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC) surveyed a group of Deaf leaders in Canada, and the general consensus was that the field was changing (AVLIC, 1988). At that time these individuals were advocating for the professionalization of the field, as they believed that interpreters had to engage in formal education and there was recognition that they were providing a service "rather than charity" (AVLIC, 1988, p. 15). One Deaf participant described it this way, "the old guard interpreters, such as ministers or social workers, [had] to choose between their career or interpreting," as doing both was considered a "conflict of interest" (AVLIC, 1988, p. 17).

When asked what abilities or attitudes they would like interpreters to have, Deaf Canadians looked for a number of characteristics. They wanted interpreters who were "as fluent as possible", who had "well-developed visual receptive skills" and facial expressions (AVLIC, 1988, p. 16). They preferred interpreters who were willing to adjust their interpretation to meet the linguistic needs of Deaf consumers and they also mentioned well-developed lag time skills (AVLIC, 1988).

In terms of attitude, this group of Deaf leaders also preferred working with individuals who had a positive attitude about Deaf culture, and who were competent, effective, professional, non-patronizing and respectful (AVLIC, 1988, p. 16). Confident and punctual were also suggested a few years later by Linda Cundy (1993).

Deaf community members also preferred working with individuals who were assertive, honest, patient, and willing to accept criticism, who admitted their mistakes and made changes where needed (AVLIC, 1988). They appreciated it when interpreters referred hearing people to the Deaf community for information about Deaf people (AVLIC, 1988).

### Concerns About Quality

Over the years concerns have been raised about the quality of interpreters in Canada. Researchers (Schein, Mallory & Greaves, 1991), parents (Palusci, 2003), and colleagues (Barker, 2002) have been worried about the quality of practitioners in educational settings in particular and have questioned the ability of educational interpreters to convey full and accurate information. A study done by Schein, Mallory and Greaves in 1991 pointed out several deficiencies in the translation work of a small cohort of educational interpreters. A few years later Tope (1993) conducted a study within a provincial school for the Deaf, and wondered whether interpreters could incorporate the paralinguistic and prosodic elements of both

languages into their interpretation. A decade later both Barker (2002), a hearing interpreter and Palusci (2003), a Deaf parent of a Deaf child were worried about the qualifications of interpreters in educational settings. It was suggested that interpreters who were not qualified to work in these settings placed the burden of decoding incomplete or inaccurate messages on the shoulders of the Deaf children they worked with, who in turn might not be bilingual enough to do this kind of mental translation (Barker, 2002).

Palusci (2003) worried that recent graduates in particular were accepting work in elementary or secondary settings with integrated Deaf students, a task for which she felt they were unqualified. She noted that experienced and more qualified interpreters would not work in these areas, due perhaps to lower salaries, which left the positions open to recent graduates (Palusci, 2003). Palusci (2003) was also concerned that Deaf students and administrators were not equipped to evaluate interpreters and she doubted that requests from Deaf students to hire more qualified service providers would be granted.

In terms of community interpreters, some Deaf Canadians have expressed unease that these service providers were not able to interpret from ASL to spoken English well. In particular it was believed that some service providers were not accurately reflecting a Deaf individuals' "exact level of intelligence" by giving them credit for their linguistic abilities in spoken English (Cundy, 1989, p. 6). Cundy (1989) gave an example to illustrate this point. If she produced the sign for "skill" in American Sign Language, she hoped that the interpreter would choose a word in English like "competence," as that was the level of sophistication she wanted to convey (Cundy, 1989). Stratiy (1996) shared a similar example. In business meetings, she would expect interpreters to use a term such as "annoyed" and not a more casual or derogatory term when translating her ASL into spoken English.

In the past, Mason (2002) reported that he had felt forced to “simplify” his presentations, disregard the syntax of ASL, follow English word order while signing, and repeat himself to ensure the interpreter understood him. By doing so, he “had to pay the price of being viewed as a simple-minded individual whose language appeared to be very primitive” (Mason, 2002, p. 8).

Deaf Canadians have also been disturbed about the attitude of some professional interpreters. In 1994 a Deaf individual was troubled by the behaviour of interpreters during a court trial, as they were perceived as taking over by acting as experts on Deaf Culture (Cripps, 1994). Deaf leaders such as Gary Malkowski (2003) have questioned the attitude of interpreters he has worked with or heard about and wonders if they were displaying "audist" characteristics.

In Newfoundland in 1987, for example a young Deaf student named Barbara LeDrew was perhaps a victim of audist practices. She had applied to take the Canadian Nursing Assistant Testing Service examination, but the examiners would not let the interpreter translate the test (Carbin, 1996). Instead, the interpreter was only allowed to provide synonyms for words or phrases, or at best paraphrase sentences in English, but could not interpret the meaning of the questions (Carbin, 1996). After her first attempt, LeDrew was later denied an interpreter in the second sitting of the test and went on to change careers (Carbin, 1996).

When asked in the late 80’s about providing feedback to interpreters, Deaf community members were admittedly hesitant to say anything critical (AVLIC, 1988). A survey conducted in 2002 obtained a similar result, in that “77% of the participants stated that Deaf students should become assertive about their interpreting needs and preferences” (Roach, 2002, p. 8).

Due to a perceived shortage of interpreters and this apprehensiveness about feedback, however, Deaf Canadians felt they have historically accepted substandard service (AVLIC, 1988; Stratiy, 1995). But in the literature there was a growing body of Deaf professionals



(AVLIC, 1988; Marshall, 1994) who had begun to actively participate in meetings or discussions, and who were changing the level of service the Deaf community was willing to accept. For example, they no longer wanted to settle for an interpretation that was “just good enough” (Stratiy, 1995, p. 2).

To that end, one Deaf individual argued for the inclusion of Deaf representatives in hiring committees and the right to require upgrading for interpreters (Stratiy, 1995). She hoped that these would lead to a future where Deaf individuals had the right to choose the interpreter they worked with, to voice feedback, and to request a change in service providers as needed (Stratiy, 1995). A group of Deaf leaders in Canada espoused similar rights for Deaf consumers of interpretation services a few years earlier (AVLIC, 1988).

When asked if the relationship between interpreters and the Deaf community had improved in 1988, some participants indicated that they did not trust interpreters and preferred working with family members or friends (AVLIC, 1988). It is interesting to note that they also suggested Deaf individuals enter the interpreting programs to become Deaf interpreters (AVLIC, 1988).

In 2002, an article written in support of Signing Exact English (SEE) (Hetman, 2002) strained the relationship between the Deaf community and interpreters. Leaders from the Deaf community were quick to point out that SEE was not a language and that by printing an article supporting it, AVLIC had “shaken [their] trust and faith in all interpreters” (Kenopic, 2002, p. 6). Several Deaf authors (Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf, 2002; Letourneau, 2002; Mason, 2002), including a faculty member of an interpretation program (Stratiy, 2002), wrote in no uncertain terms that they did not support the use of SEE. Mason (2002) challenged the signing

skills of professionals who purported to use SEE and questioned whether it was favored by weaker or dysfluent interpreters.

Similar concerns were raised in Montreal in the early 80's (Carbin, 1996). As mentioned earlier, Deaf students had formed an organization to lobby for their right to services and have since voiced concerns that the few interpreters available used Signed French, as they followed the grammar of spoken French and not the grammar of Langue des Signes Québécois (LSQ) (Carbin, 1996).

Notwithstanding the concerns about using SEE, there was a feeling in the late 1980's and early 90's that the relationship had improved between professional interpreters and the Deaf community (AVLIC, 1988; Cundy, 1993). It was noted that this was "contingent on the nature of the local deaf community: the better educated and more articulate it [was], the better the quality of the relationship" (AVLIC, 1988, p. 15).

In 1988 Canadian Deaf leaders had begun to see more professionalism in the field, and more openness to consumer input (AVLIC, 1988). Interpreters seemed generally more respectful of the diversity of the Deaf community and Deaf culture as there were fewer interpreters teaching sign language classes (AVLIC, 1988) thus creating more positions for Deaf instructors. There was a growing emphasis on social interaction for interpreters within the Deaf community (AVLIC, 1988). Deaf leaders, such as David Mason (2002) wrote that he was "impressed with how the ASL-English interpreting profession has been growing" and reported, "the level of accuracy has been rising" (p. 8).

#### National and Provincial Organizations

In Canada there is one national, professional organization to represent ASL-English interpreters, the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC), which was

founded in 1979 in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Carbin, 1996; Letourneau, 1990; Russell & Malcolm, 1992). AVLIC's "Founding Mothers" (emphasis author's)(Letourneau, 1990, p. 1) were Louise Ford, Janice Hawkins, and Dottie Inkenbrandt.

In addition to the national organization, there exists in almost every province a chapter of AVLIC that represents sign language interpreters on a local level. In 1976 the Manitoba Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf was established (Carbin, 1996). In 1977 the Alberta chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf was founded (Carbin, 1996). Later in 1982 the Association Québécoise des Interprètes Francophones en Langage Visuel (AQIFLV) was formed in Montreal (Carbin, 1996). One of the newest chapters established was the Newfoundland Association of Visual Language Interpreters (AVLIC, 2007a).

AVLIC administers a national certification test, the Canadian Evaluation System (CES), which was designed within a philosophy of community consultation (Russell & Malcolm, 1992; Stratiy, 1996). The Canadian Association of the Deaf and the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf were active in the test design, in the recruitment of ASL raters, and in the establishment of an acceptable standard (Russell & Malcolm, 1992). The test consisted of two parts, a written and performance component (Russell & Malcolm, 1992).

The standard for the performance test was established in a holistic manner by three groups, a team of experienced ASL instructors whose native language was ASL, skilled interpreters with some background in interpreter education, and English language consultants (Russell & Malcolm, 1992). These three groups watched a series of samples from interpreters nationwide operating at different levels of ability and established the features necessary for a successful interpretation in three domains; ASL, message equivalency, and English respectively (Russell & Malcolm, 1992).

In addition to the national certification system, private consultants have developed assessment tools of their own in Canada (Taylor, 1993). Taylor heads Interpreting Consolidated, a company based in Canada, that offers diagnostic assessment services to working interpreters (Taylor, 1994). Interpreting Consolidated's process is based on "task and error analysis" (Taylor, 1993, p.6) and is designed to examine "knowledge-lean skills" followed by "knowledge-rich skills" (Taylor, 1993, p. 7).

#### Canadian Association for the Education of Sign Language Interpreters

There was at one point in Canada a national professional organization for interpreter educators, the Canadian Association for the Education of Sign Language Interpreters (CAESLI) (Janzen, 1992a; Taylor, 1988b). CAESLI was founded in 1985 and by 1988, after three years, was a small group of professionals who met to share resources (Taylor, 1988b). By this point, CAESLI had held preliminary meetings with some interpreter referral services to discuss the remediation of gaps that existed in interpreter education (Taylor, 1988b).

In 1992, Janzen reported that as CAESLI members both Deaf and hearing instructors had met to discuss an ASL curriculum, labs, ethics courses, and program administrative issues. As a group, they had "ratified a mission statement which states that our purpose is to promote quality education for English/ASL and French/LSQ interpreters" (Janzen, 1992a, p. 14). In addition, the members had agreed that their mandate was "to promote high standards in interpreter education programs, to work alongside other Deaf and interpreter organizations, provide professional development for interpreter educators, and promote a bilingual/bicultural approach in interpreter education" (Janzen, 1992a, p. 14).

Janzen also noted that CAESLI and national Deaf and interpreting organizations were concerned "regarding the state of interpreter education in existing and potential programs"

(1992a, p. 14). In the late 1980s and early 1990s programs were only ten months in duration, and it was felt that it was “not nearly long enough to fully educate an interpreter” (Taylor, 1988b, p. 14). To address those concerns, CAESLI was drafting a position paper on interpreter education standards and had agreed to work with the Deaf community to support their views of interpreters in educational settings with Deaf students (Janzen, 1992a). Unfortunately, at the time of writing this manuscript CAESLI was no longer in existence but the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada had adopted its mandate.

### Legislation

In a review of the history of sign language interpreting in Canada it should be recognized that there are two pieces of Canadian legislation at the federal level that grant Deaf Canadians a legal right to sign language interpreters. The first is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 14 (1982), which deals with the provision of sign language interpreters in court proceedings. The second important piece of legislation is the decision by the Supreme Court of Canada (*Eldridge v. British Columbia (Attorney General)* 3 S.C.R. 624, 1997) that mandates the provision of interpreters for medical procedures deemed serious in nature.

There is also a growing trend at the provincial level to recognize American Sign Language as a language. In 1988, Manitoba became the first province to recognize ASL "as the language of the Deaf community" (Carbin, 1996, p. 329) with Alberta following suit two years later (Letourneau, 1990). In fact, Alberta went a step further and identified ASL as "an optional language of classroom instruction in schools, colleges, and universities" (Carbin, 1996, p. 329). As of 1993, Ontario recognized ASL and LSQ as mandatory, not optional, languages of instruction for Deaf students, becoming the third province to do so to date (Carbin, 1996).

## Formal Interpreter Education in Canada

Over the last two decades, there have been a number of programs established to prepare ASL-English interpreters in Canada. The highest number of courses operating was eight in 1999, all within community colleges (Scully, 1999). There has also been some discussion about the level of education required to be an interpreter, with some preference given for a university education (Boldrini & McDermid, 2000; MacFarlane, 1990; Madore, 2000). At present there are currently five programs, which are housed within Douglas College (British Columbia), Lakeland College (Alberta), George Brown College (Ontario), Nova Scotia Community College, and a joint program between Red River College and the University of Manitoba. This last program co-hosted by Red River College and the University of Manitoba addresses the need for more advanced post-secondary education in the field.

Several issues have been raised about the quality of program graduates and preparation programs. It was believed historically that graduates experienced "problems understanding" Deaf people (AVLIC, 1988, p. 17) perhaps because the length of time students studied ASL was also described as inadequate (Stratiy, 1995; Taylor, 1988b). It was felt that some students left their programs with basic interpreting abilities (Stratiy, 1995) or less (Janzen, 1999). They were not fluent in ASL (Scully, 1999; Stratiy, 1995) and might not improve their language fluency after they found employment (Stratiy, 1995).

As a result of these concerns, new standards were created in Ontario for programs by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1998). Provincial organizations of Deaf Canadians have also argued for change and have asked for mandatory membership in the Deaf community for students (Ontario Association of the Deaf, 1993). This was described as the only way for a

student's language to continue to develop and their understanding of Deaf culture to grow (Ontario Association of the Deaf, 1993).

Current research, however, has identified that the field is satisfied with the coursework currently offered (Madore, 2000). All programs require some degree of fluency in ASL prior to enrolment as demonstrated by the completion of a Deaf Studies Program, and students are screened for other competencies such as English fluency and knowledge of Deaf culture (McDermid, 2005). The preparation programs have also evolved into longer programs as suggested by the literature (Madore, 2000) and as evidenced by the joint program between the University of Manitoba and Red River College (2008).

Prior to discussing the history of ASL-English interpreter preparation programs in Canada it is important to recognize the education of francophone sign language interpreters. At one time there were two Langues des Signes Québécois (LSQ) – French interpreter programs in existence. One was housed within Cambrian College in Sudbury, Ontario (Carbin, 1996) that in 1997 was transferred to Boreal College (Scully, 1999). The second program existed within the University of Quebec at Montreal and was opened in 1990 (Carbin, 1996; Caron, 1990; Desroches, 1994). This program ran for one year at the certificate level and consisted of 10 courses in either the sign language stream or the oral interpreting stream (Caron, 1990; Desroches, 1994). The courses offered were theoretical and practical in nature and touched on the history and role of interpreters and included “three workshops focusing on French and LSQ” (Desroches, 1994, p. 12). The students were also required to complete 135 hours of placements and the program had six sign language interpreter graduates as of 1994 (Desroches, 1994). Unfortunately at present and according to the literature there is no formal training for interpreters in the culture and language of francophone Deaf Canadians (MacKenzie, 1990).

Turning to the ASL-English interpretation programs, the following is a brief synopsis of their history, beginning from the east coast, Newfoundland, and ending in British Columbia. In 1981 the Newfoundland Coordinating Council on Deafness received federal funding for three initiatives, interpreter training, a referral service, and a needs assessment of the Deaf community (Carbin, 1996). An interpreter education program was later established at Academy Canada, a private college in St. John's, which was unfortunately closed in 2002.

On the mainland a program was established in Halifax in 1990 within Saint Mary's University that was delivered by five instructors and that included 26 courses and a practicum (MacFarlane, 1990). This program reportedly faced a variety of challenges, from difficulty in securing placement opportunities, to consumers calling the program or contacting the students to ask them to interpret before graduation (MacFarlane, 1990). While housed in a university setting, it was not accredited by Saint Mary's University, which the staff felt was "essential in order to produce the quality of interpreters that Canadians deserve and need" (MacFarlane, 1990, p. 8).

By 1994, the program at St. Mary's was no longer in existence, but the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) had established a 2 year program and had at that point 17 students enrolled (Smith, 1994). The entrance requirements included grade 12 and a minimum 2 levels of ASL (Smith, 1994), which was later increased to 4 levels (Nova Scotia Community College, 2007). In addition, there was a screening process established which examined each applicants' fluency in ASL and English and knowledge of Deaf culture and the Deaf community (Smith, 1994; Nova Scotia Community College, 2007).

The program at NSCC employed one full time instructor, an interpreter, and one part-time faculty, a member of the Deaf community (Smith, 1994). Its advisory board had



representatives from the local and national Deaf clubs, national and provincial interpreting organizations, and members of the business community (Smith, 1994).

Looking east to Ontario there has been a number of programs within a variety of institutions. In 1982, a program ran for a brief time at the University of Ottawa. Like the program at St. Mary's it too was not accredited and was unfortunately only a pilot project (Carbin, 1996). At one point St. Lawrence College in Kingston also housed an interpretation program (Carbin, 1996).

In 1994, Cambrian College in Sudbury began a sign language interpreter education program (Ryan, 1994). The goal of this program was to help solve the shortage of interpreters in northern Ontario (Ryan, 1994).

Sheridan College opened the doors of both its communicator and interpreter programs in 1987 (Dwyer, 1994). At one time the faculty consisted of five full-time professors, one support staff, and four part-time faculty members with a total of five Deaf instructors (Dwyer, 1994). Acceptance to the program was competitive with approximately 250 applications per year for only 72 spots available (Dwyer, 1994). The faculty reported "close to 80 per cent" of the graduates were working (Dwyer, 1994, p. 14). Like others, the program had an advisory committee made up of employers, interpreter associations, consumers, and government officials (Dwyer, 1994). It was faced by the challenge for more placement sites and the need for more community and stake-holder involvement (Dwyer, 1994).

Like Sheridan College, St. Clair College opened its two-year full-time sign language communicator program in 1987 (Decator, 1994). The goal of the program was to introduce "the students to American Sign Language and Deaf culture through a bilingual/bicultural approach" (Decator, 1994, p. 15). Decator (1994) described the interpreter program as a "one-year intensive

course aimed at introducing the interpreter student to current working process models of interpretation and current ethical guidelines as prescribed by AVLIC" (p. 15). It included five weeks of supervised practicum and intensive diagnostic evaluations of ASL to English and English to ASL skills (Decator, 1994). In 1994, a majority of the staff were Deaf, with two Deaf faculty members and three Deaf lab assistants. There were two additional staff, one hearing faculty and one hearing resource technologist (Decator, 1994). At that point, there had been over 100 graduates, with 50 percent working full-time in the field, 15 percent part-time in the field, and 20 percent had continued their post secondary studies in related and non-related fields (Decator, 1994).

By 1998, St. Clair revamped its program to a three-year interpreter program and a one-year pre-interpreter program (Decator, 1998). At that point, the mission of the program was "to assist individuals in successfully developing their knowledge, skills, and values so as to enhance their quality of life, improve their ability to acquire meaningful employment, and promote their community involvement" (Decator, 1998, p. 9). The program recognized its role in developing community-based partnerships and in the provision of leadership, and had adopted a philosophy that fostered a supportive learning environment and lifelong learning (Decator, 1998).

George Brown College began its interpreter education program in 1997. Applicants were required to demonstrate conversational fluency in ASL, which was defined as 200 hours of direct ASL instruction (George Brown College, 2007). The program was three years in duration, during which time students participated in five placements in each semester subsequent to the initial term (George Brown College, 2007).

Unlike the other provinces the programs in Ontario were originally designed as three years in duration with a two-year communicator certificate program followed by a one-year

interpreter post-diploma program (Dwyer; 1994, Decator; 1994; Ryan, 1994). This was reexamined (Dwyer, 1994) and in 1997 the programs offered at George Brown, St. Clair and Cambrian were revised to include a one-year ASL certificate program followed by a three year interpreter program (Scully, 1999). This redesign of the curriculum increased the interpretation programs to three years and established an ASL immersion program as a pre-requisite to enrolment. At the time of this writing, only one program as being offered in Ontario and that was at George Brown College in Toronto.

Further west, Red River Community College in Manitoba was the "first to offer formal training in Canada" (Janzen, 1994, p. 13). In the mid-1970's it offered a 4-week course that by 1982 had become a 10-month program (Janzen, 1994). In 1988 it was expanded to a two-year diploma program (Janzen, 1994; Taylor, 1988a). This program (Janzen, 1994) and the one offered by Nova Scotia Community College were unique from the others in that they both graduated and accepted students every second year, instead of annually. At Red River, students were required to be "functionally bilingual in ASL and English" prior to enrollment, but it was recognized that a considerable amount of time was spent in the first year on improving the students' fluency in both (Janzen, 1994, p. 13).

The first year of the program offered three courses on translation skills, of which the first focused solely on English, the second on ASL, and the third covered both languages (Janzen, 1994). Courses were also offered on the theory of interpreting, the culture and history of the Deaf community, cultural anthropology, and ethics (Janzen, 1994). In addition to its regular offerings, the program had piloted a number of new classes, and in 1994 offered a course on introduction to general linguistics (Janzen, 1994). Approval was also given in 1994 for a summer institute in interpreting in an area of specialization (Janzen, 1994).

In 1999, Red River Community College began a one-year Deaf studies program "to teach and to orient students to the Deaf community" (Janzen, 1999, p. 4). It became a prerequisite for entry into the interpreting program, but it was not restricted to just interpreting students (Janzen, 1999). By offering a Deaf Studies program, Red River was able to separate "language learning from interpretation learning" (Janzen, 1999, p. 4). In essence it gave the students a chance to improve their fluency in ASL and learn about the Deaf community prior to pursuing interpretation studies (Janzen, 1999). This progression of courses allowed the interpretation program to spend more time on interpreting skills and less on language development (Janzen, 1999).

As research on interpreting has increased over the years Janzen (1999) wrote that the program has grappled with course content. In order to manage and limit the topics for instruction, one strategy has been to eliminate formal coursework on transliteration, thus also providing more time for ASL (Janzen, 1999). It was hoped that the students would use what they had learned in the program to develop transliteration skills later as needed (Janzen, 1999).

In 1994 the program at Red River had a "community-based advisory committee " (Janzen, 1994, p. 13) and was working to establish a relationship with spoken language interpreters and translators (Janzen, 1994). By 1999, Janzen reported that the program was then in the process of establishing a joint program with Department of Linguistics at the University of Manitoba. Currently, after 4 years of study at Red River including one year within a Deaf Studies program, and three years at the University of Manitoba, graduates receive a diploma from Red River and a bachelor's degree from the University of Manitoba (Red River Community College, 2007).

Further west, Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton also offered an ASL-English interpreter preparation program at one time. It opened its program in 1984 (Stratiy, 1994) and by 1987 it had become a full program, 10 months in duration (Stratiy, 1994), at the certificate level (Taylor, 1986). Students were selected based on their “language skills and previous exposure to, and understanding of, the deaf community” (Taylor, 1986, p. 18). The program planned on having 1200 hours of instruction, “with emphasis on practical skill development in the two languages of American Sign Language and English and Sign to Voice and Voice to Sign Interpreting Processes” (Taylor, 1986, p. 18). As reported by the faculty, the mandate of the program was to provide "students with the basic, practical knowledge and skills required for entry into the profession" (Stratiy, 1994 p.10). It was hoped that upon completion students would be "knowledgeable about the professional network of interpreters, the major agencies providing services to the Deaf community and the variety of perspective consumers of interpreting services" (Stratiy, 1994, p. 10). Course work included classes on ethics, standards of the profession, Deaf culture and community, cross cultural issues while interpreting and 150 hours of practicum (Stratiy, 1994). Instructional time was “devoted to skill development in the core areas of ASL to English and English to ASL interpreting processes. ” (Stratiy, 1994, p. 10) At the same time language development in both was a priority for the program (Stratiy, 1994). As noted earlier this program is no longer being offered.

In 2007, Lakeland College in Alberta began a Sign Language and Deaf Studies Certificate program (Lakeland College, 2007a). It has also advertised and will begin to offer a program in interpretation (Lakeland College, 2007b).

Finally, British Columbia was home to the sign language interpreter program at King Edward Community College in Vancouver (now Vancouver Community College) (Carbin,

1996). This program was later transferred to Douglas College in New Westminster (Carbin, 1996) where it began in January of 1988 (Taylor, 1988a) and is still in operation today.

Douglas College has a two-year diploma program, which is offered both full or part-time (Douglas College, 2007; Malcolm, 1994). As of 1994, it accepted a maximum of 16 students per year (Malcolm, 1994). Prior to enrolling at Douglass College, students are encouraged to attend the 10-month Sign Language Studies Program at Vancouver Community College (VCC) (Douglas College, 2007; Malcolm, 1999), where they get exposure to three Deaf instructors and three or four Deaf assistants (Malcolm, 1999). At VCC students study ASL daily and receive regular feedback, they examine the culture and literature of the Deaf community, and they examine the oppression faced by Deaf Canadians (Malcolm, 1999).

#### Reflections of Graduates

In addition to the views of interpreter educators and Deaf community members, the literature contained a number of articles written by recent graduates of interpretation programs. The following is a brief snapshot of some of the issues and themes relevant to this cohort.

Bennett (1996) graduated from the Sheridan College interpretation program and found her program supported the philosophy of a “hands on approach” (p. 6). Several graduates in Ontario (Bennett, 1996; Lawley, 2000; Woolley, 2000) felt that their programs did not offer enough practice and one suggested that there was an expectation their education would continue post graduation (Lawley, 2000).

Some graduates advocated for stricter entry requirements (Bennett, 1996). Others noted that interpersonal skills and establishing good relationships with colleagues was imperative (Lawley, 2000). Some students were taught that “discretion, impartiality, self-policing, objectivity and flexibility were important” (Kaye, 1988, p. 11), and left their programs feeling

that a positive attitude was paramount (Bennett, 1996; Kaye, 1988). But graduates questioned whether a good attitude could actually be taught (Bennett, 1996; Kaye, 1988).

Beaudry (2001), in a description of her program, said it emphasized the use of ASL while interpreting and the avoidance of invented sign systems or transliteration. She noted a discrepancy, however, between that philosophy and what she saw in the field after graduation; interpreters using signed English and oral interpreting, in addition to ASL (Beaudry, 2001). While a student, she felt “shocked” to see working interpreters not using ASL but later wished she had spent more time examining that type of work (Beaudry, 2001, p. 6).

Many former students commented on the benefits they received from their placement experiences as students (Bennett, 1996; Fauteux, 2000; Janoschak, 2000; Lawley, 2000; Livingstone, 2000; Schnarr, 2000; Woolley, 2000). It was here that they felt their best learning occurred (Woolley, 2000), where they could apply the theory from the class to real world situations (Fauteux, 2000; Woolley, 2000).

Schnarr (2000) noted, however, that some hosts were unsure of how to supervise students and suggested nine strategies. These include challenging students, providing positive feedback that was realistic, sharing both good and bad experiences, "asking open-ended questions that lead to discussion", trusting in the student's judgment, discussing feeding techniques, and describing their own professional growth (Schnarr, 2000, p. 8).

### Issues and Trends

In terms of other significant trends in the literature there has been a steady increase in the last two decades in research on cross-cultural conflicts and teaching methods for visual language interpreters in Canada. Educators and researchers have attempted to define Deaf culture and given interpreters examples of cross-cultural faux pas and expectations (Evans & Bomak, 1996;

Still, 1990; Stratiy, 1989; Stratiy, 1996; Taylor & Stratiy, 1992). Cutting edge research has been done into consecutive interpreting in legal settings (Russell, 2002). The field has been asked to consider the abilities and role of novice or expert interpreters (Taylor, 1990).

Several authors and researchers in Canada have begun to look at interpreter education (Humphrey, 1996; Madore, 2000; McDermid, 2005). They have written about a number of issues facing programs, such as entrance requirements (Humphrey, 1996; Madore, 2000; McDermid, 2005), the role and qualifications of educators (Humphrey, 1996; McDermid, 2005), program mandates (Humphrey, 1996; McDermid, 2005), and curriculum development (Madore, 2000; McDermid, 2005).

In the last two decades, Canadian authors have also given us tools to teach interpretation and pre-interpreting topics (Lambert, 1988), such as ethics (Janzen, 1992), mind mapping (Ford, 1988), and transliteration (Malcolm, 1992). Attempts have been made to review and assess the state of the art in Canadian interpreter education (Madore, 2000; McDermid, 2005).

Finally and in closing, this article has tried to capture some of the milestones in the field of ASL-English interpretation in Canada. But as with any piece of writing, there are limits to what can be included and unfortunately not every issue could be address. To that end, the reader is encouraged to visit the web site of the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (2007b) and other resources found within the bibliography of this article.

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